

# US Reps Debate Alaska Drilling In Letters To Colleagues



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WASHINGTON ([Dow Jones](#))--U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo wants his fellow members in the House to think twice about supporting a bill aimed at keeping the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge off limits to energy development.

"America needs American oil. Support ANWR production," said California Republican Pombo, chairman of the House Resources Committee, in a letter to members of the House.

Earlier in the week, U.S. Reps. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and Nancy Johnson, R-Conn., sent letters to the same group, asking them to support a bill they plan on reintroducing that's aimed at preventing drilling in the coastal plan of ANWR.

"We must draw the line against drilling in our few remaining pristine habitats set aside specifically for preserving wildlife for future generations," the lawmakers said in their "Dear Colleague" letter. "If we allow drilling in (ANWR), there will be no place in America so special that it cannot be opened up for commercial exploitation."

But Pombo, attacked that letter as being one laden with "hyperbolic and emotional pleas" and one that should be approached "with great caution, if not incredible skepticism."

Defending efforts to open up ANWR, Pombo said energy production and exploration in ANWR would take place on just 2,000 acres of its 1.5-million-acre coastal plan, which amounts to just .0003 % of Alaska's protected lands.

Plus, there's no shortage of 'special places' in Alaska or America, he said, noting that Alaska holds 16 national wildlife refuges, 13 national parks and 25 wild, scenic or recreational rivers.

His comments come as Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, R-N.M., prepares to insert an ANWR resolution into the budget-reconciliation process and just a week after U.S. Energy Secretary nominee Samuel Bodman, who described himself as an "energetic advocate" for opening Alaska to drilling, also noted the "very small" area that would be needed for oil development.

Still, Markey and Johnson, in their letter, suggested that while political pressure for drilling is growing, corporate interest is waning. As an example, they turned to [ConocoPhillips](#) (COP), the largest producer of oil on Alaska's North Slope, which recently announced its withdrawal from Arctic Power, the chief lobbyist group pushing

for rights to the Refuge.

But, according to Pombo, the country needs Alaska oil.

"At today's prices, ANWR's mean estimate of 10.3 billion barrels of oil amounts to \$500 billion we could spend here at home, rather than sending equal amounts overseas to import this resource from the Middle East," he said.

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